‘The past is a promise to the future’

‘The Past is a Promise to the Future’: Stories, Persons, and the Devil in Greece

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Drawing on ethnography from central Greece, this paper is about the way people narrate their encounters with the devil. Although it echoes the idea that life as told and life as lived are structured in the same way, it takes the argument a step further by suggesting they are structured through a narrative plot wherein the present and the future of the story-tellers predate the past of which their stories tell. It also foregrounds the link between this structure and a particular kind of morality which replicates the narrative logic of the stories giving rise to an inherently relational personhood; a personhood that, just like the way in which its narration destabilizes the logic of before and after, destabilizes the distinction between self and other. Lastly, contextualizing the current economic crisis in the lives of such persons, it suggests we need to think of it in relation to the devil and the stories people tell of him.

How do you imagine ‘the devil’ (*to diavolo*)? Aggeliki,[1] in her twenties, thinks of him as ‘black, with red eyes, a billy goat’s head and swords for horns’. Giannis, in his sixties, depicts him as ‘black, lame and snub-nosed’. For Giorgos, in his early fifties, even though ‘he has no eyes, he wears big sun-glasses’. ‘Why doesn’t the devil have eyes?’, I ask. ‘He doesn’t need them’, he answers – ‘he takes ours’. More than that, before he ‘takes our eyes’, he ‘dazzles us’ and ‘numbs our body’. Christos, Giorgos’s friend, agrees and adds: ‘he doesn’t take just our eyes, he takes our legs and our hands, […] he silences us, […] enters our body from our mouth, just like our breath’.

As I found the idea of numb bodies and Christos’s obvious graveness quite uncomfortable, I tried to make a joke – admittedly something inane (devil, Prada, and sunglasses is rather unfortunately what came to mind!) – which made him quite angry. ‘If you don’t want to know’, he said, ‘you shouldn’t ask’! ‘In any case’, he continued, what he had just told me was not ‘fantasy’ but ‘something he had lived through’. Christos and Giorgos did not have to imagine the devil. They had ‘felt’ him and, in some cases, fought with him. Indeed, the devil was often linked to the economic crisis that has engulfed Greece. Perceived as a moral crisis, it was intimately associated with his presence in their life. As Giorgos put it, ‘the devil is inside the Greeks’.

This paper is about people like Giorgos and Christos. It is about the way in which they remember their encounters with the devil and relate these memories in the form of particular narratives. I shall explore the significance of these narratives in order to show how my informants articulate a particular kind of personhood through them – a personhood articulated, first and foremost, in hindsight. In their stories, the distinction between what comes before, and what comes after, is undermined by a narrative logic wherein the coherence of their identity is achieved backwards – they are back-to-front

persons.

Most of my informants live in a small town in Central Greece. I had heard a number of rumours about people who could see the devil and that is where I started. I had the opportunity to work with about twenty people, the youngest in her early twenties and the oldest in his eighties. From retired civil servants and policemen to domestic carers and shopkeepers, it is difficult to present a generalized picture of who they were. In terms of income, most described their life as 'difficult' but their expectations and hopes for the future were quite different. However, what nearly all of them shared was a strong belief in God. Although this did not always translate as an attachment to the official Church, God was thought to be at the centre of their lives – as a retired civil servant put it, 'God is our life'. One's relation to God was mostly perceived in terms of 'sacrifice' (*thisia*) or 'debt' (c*hreos*). To echo Maria, a mother of two in her early fifties, 'we owe ourselves to God – life is sacrifice'.

Despite the rather dramatic emphasis on sacrifice, it is important to emphasize, there was nothing extreme about this God. There were no links between my informants and zealotic ecclesiastic or monastic circles. That is not to say there were no conservative attitudes in their lives but they did not see themselves as the true guardians of the 'Faith' or the 'Nation'. The tropes which seem to characterize Greek Orthodox Fundamentalism (e.g., defending the values of 'Fatherland, Religion, Family' or the inseparability of Greek identity from Orthodoxy; see Kessareas 2018) were largely absent in what they said or did. In fact, the question of faith was often framed as a 'human' (*anthropino*), rather than Greek, quest. In this quest, the devil played a very important role and it is this role they shared with me through their stories.[2]

These stories were shared with some reluctance. For many Greeks, including many of their friends, my informants' stories were nothing but 'naivety' and 'fairy tales'. However, albeit laughing, the very same friends would often refuse to discuss them for fear of 'provoking' the devil. Something that Charles Stewart tried to captured by describing the devil's nature in Greece as 'amphibological' (from 'doubt' in Greek) – that is, involving no neat split between believers and non-believers, people shifting positions, even managing to be both at the same time (2008). Something I found myself doing too while listening to their narratives.

From providing 'privileged access to the subjective experience of illness' (Woods 2011: 73) to humanizing legal 'rules and procedures' (Hinchman & Hinchman 1997: 3), narratives seem to be everywhere these days. The reason may be, as Unni Wikan has it, that 'people bleed stories, but academics gather narratives' (2000: 217). For Wikan, story-telling is full of unfinished endings and hesitations while 'telling a neat narrative, nicely structured around an ending that gives meaning to the whole thing, is a luxury life does not afford to many of the world's inhabitants' (ibid.: 232). Although I am not sure that life in Greece affords much luxury to my informants, what I have gathered are certainly narratives. Despite hesitations and occasional silences, their stories were almost always about endings. Endings that 'gave meaning to the whole thing' bringing together their stories and their lives.

Of course, the intimate link between stories and lives has become almost a truism in anthropology. Echoing classic works on the way narrative helps order chaotic or discordant experiences (Bruner 1986) and give them temporal integration (Ricoeur 1984), anthropologists have explored how it enables people to articulate their lives in a meaningful manner. Narrative, as Linda Garro and Cheryl Mattingly put it, 'is a fundamental human way of giving meaning to experience' (2000: 1). 'Linking motive, act, and consequences' (ibid.), it enables people to position themselves in a meaningful world. The meaning-endowing potential of narrative is thought to stem from its power to articulate a plot – that is, 'a meaningful whole' (Mattingly 1994: 813). More than that, people do not plot only their stories. They plot their lives too. As Mattingly puts it, quoting Frank Kermode, we act 'with the "sense of an ending"' (ibid.). Thus, our lives and our stories are similarly plotted – 'there is a basic homology between lived time and time structured within narrative discourse' (ibid.:813).[3]

My informants plot too. However, there is something deeply paradoxical in the way they do it. The relation between the world in which they tell their stories and the world of which their stories tell is inverted. In their narratives, the distinction between what comes before and what comes after is undermined. In this way, they problematize the main characteristic attributed to narrative. As Mattingly has it,

> In a story, time is structured by a movement from one state of affairs (a beginning) to a transformed state of affairs (an ending). […] The structure of beginning-middle-end presumes, of course, that time is marked by anticipation of some end, one which, to make another obvious point, does not exist at the beginning. (1994: 819).

This is not to suggest that beginnings and endings are always unambiguously linked. From 'what-if' scenarios to the 'may-be' of different possible outcomes, the stories people tell can be inherently uncertain. Indeed, uncertainty could be seen as intrinsic to the way narrative works. Jerome Bruner, for instance, insisted that narratives do not create meaning only by ordering experiences but by 'subjunctivising reality' too – 'by trafficking', that is, 'in human possibilities rather than settled certainties' (1986: 26). From the imagination of alternative futures and indeterminate realities to unclear beginnings and endings, there has been a lot of work along these lines (e.g., Good 1994, Mattingly 2010). However, although alternative futures and unclear endings might produce ambiguous or open-ended narratives, they are still marked by anticipation of some kind of future; a future that does not exist in the present nor, of course, in the past. In this sense, subjunctive or not, they are still about some end that 'does not exist at the beginning'.

In the stories I shall discuss, the end pre-exists the beginning. Such an end does not articulate only my informants' stories but their lives too. 'I will tell you my story as I lived it', Giorgos said; 'my life is a story', Eleni insisted. In this sense, they are good examples of 'historicity' or, to echo Stephan Palmié and Charles Stewart, 'forms of human awareness of being and becoming in time' (2016: 223) that do not conform to the canons of standard historiography and

its linear chronology.

Thus, given their paradoxical chronology, how do such narratives give meaning to experience? How does one tell of his or her past when their present predates it? How are the past, the present and the future integrated in the temporality of such stories? More than that, how can these narratives be both 'their story' and 'their life'? How does one live in a present that pre-exists its own past? How do these narratives link 'motive, act, and consequences' when the consequences come before motive and act?

These are the questions I shall try to answer. In doing so, I will follow the way my informants answered my own questions. In the first part of the paper, I shall focus on their stories in order to show how life as told is structured through a narrative plot wherein the present and the future of the storytellers predate the past of which their stories tell – that is, their own past. However, these stories were also a manifestation of who they are today. It was their encounter with the devil that enabled them to live as 'good Christians'. In the second part of the paper, I shall elucidate how this life is lived through a very particular kind of personhood – a personhood that, just like its narration undermines the distinction between past and present, undermines the distinction between self and other. Lastly, in the third part, I shall show how my informants' understanding of their stories and their lives is replicated in their understanding of the current crisis questioning the idea that there is something new to the present-day 'hardships' of the Greek people.

1. Metalepsis: Christos's story

As Stewart notes, the 'Orthodox Church has always unambiguously considered the devil inferior and subordinate to God' (1991: 146). In fact, it was God himself who created the devil. Before he created Adam and Eve, God created the angels to act as his messengers. However, led by Satan, a group of them revolted and attempted to place themselves higher than God. Punished for their arrogance, 'Satan and his attendant angels were cast down from the heavens and compelled to reside variously on earth or beneath the earth' (ibid.: 141).

My informants spoke of these angels and their leader in a variety of ways. Echoing the New Testament, they were often described as scorpions, lions and serpents. Beyond the variety of the terms used, there was agreement as to the kind of challenge the devil presents – he was depicted as the temptation to cheat, lie and harm those around you. In relation to temptation, he was often associated with Genesis in the Old Testament and the story of the serpent that tempts Adam and Eve. As temptation, the devil does not deny free will – '[h]uman choice, both in Eden and after the fall, allows Satan an opening that he may exploit' (ibid.: 142). It is the fear of such an opening most of them emphasized because the devil is 'cunning'. Through his trickery, he 'ties you' (*se denei*) and keeps you away from God. Perhaps, their stories can be described as narratives of untying. They loosened and eventually discarded these ties by 'turning their soul towards God'. It is this turning the

stories narrated.

Using a single story to structure my discussion, I shall concentrate on Christos's 'experience' which, despite missing the drama of other encounters with the devil, exhibits in a clear way a number of characteristics shared by many of the stories I collected.

…

Once you have driven over the bridge, the road follows the river for a hundred meters or so before turning left and starting to climb towards a small village about twenty kilometres from where he lives. Standing at the edge of the road, Christos is trying to explain what happened ten years ago.

He was driving, on his own, from a friend's place back to his home. Even though it was very early in the morning, 'still dark', he did not feel especially tired. He had drunk nothing more than two beers the night before. He had just crossed the bridge and was getting ready to take the first bend when he suddenly felt 'lost' and the world around him 'dissolved'. He lost consciousness and, when he 'opened his eyes' again, he realized he had crashed into a ditch and onto a supporting wall. Dazed and frightened, he managed to get out of the car.

How did he feel 'lost?', I asked. Did he see anything? Did he hear anything? But, just like ten years ago, he could not really explain what had happened. He remembers that he felt strange. He 'could not see' and 'could not move'. He talked about dizziness and heart palpitations. He thought he heard someone whisper his name. But he could not remember now, just as he could not remember then. There was one word that he kept using – *stenochoria*. A kind of numbness, an inability to breathe and move. It was, he said, like 'a big weight on [him]'.

He went on to describe how he checked himself for injuries before phoning his brother to come and give him a lift back. In the afternoon, they returned to check over the car more carefully. It was only then that he realized how serious it could have been. The car was a write-off.

Two weeks later, on the other side of the mountains, he visited one of his best friends in a neighbouring town. As he was looking for a new car, they had planned to check a few car dealerships and have dinner together. As soon as he knocked on his friend's door, he felt a strange 'jubilation' that almost made him cry. He followed his friend into the living room where he realized there was another visitor – an old monk from a local monastery who was a close friend of the family. He kissed his hand and sat down. It was when the monk 'touched him' that his jubilation became almost unbearable. He calmed down only when the old man said his name: 'so your name is Christos'. 'You are lucky', he went on, 'to have the name of Christ; it's not a coincidence, nothing is coincidental'.

After a few minutes of silence, the monk asked him: ‘did you have an accident recently’? Quite surprised at the question, as neither he nor his friend had mentioned it, Christos explained what had happened and showed him the scratches on his hands. ‘It’s nothing’, the monk said. ‘Christ saved you. He’s the one who kept you alive. Two more road-bends and you would have fallen off the cliff. He didn’t allow it to happen because, if it had, you would have delivered your spirit to the devil. You see, Christ has other plans for you’.

This is where my friend’s narrative both starts and ends. It starts because, as he put it, ‘everyone has a story but he needs to find it, to understand it’ and, through his accident (which, he insisted, ‘was not an accident’), he had. It ends because, it ceases being a story and becomes a quest for a particular kind of life – a life which, to echo a number of my informants with similar experiences, demands that your ‘soul is turned towards God’.

Here is how Christos explained it:

> From that moment, I started to ‘search myself’. This was the day I realized ‘what I will have been today’ (*afto pou tha eho ginei simera*), […] ‘where I will have ended up today’ (*pou tha eho katalixei simera*). I started visiting monasteries and churches, asking questions and trying to learn. It is the ‘eyes of the soul’ that matter […]. There is an invisible war [between God and the devil] and it is only these eyes that allow us to see the signs. Until you can see the signs, you don’t realize where the demons are and they are everywhere. I changed, everything changed!

But why did he have to change? Why did the devil choose to (almost) take him rather than his brother or anybody else? He did not really explain. He alluded to ‘mistakes’, some kind of a ‘difficulty’ but did not want to say anything more. ‘Did you believe in the devil before the car crash?’, I asked. ‘I never thought about it’, he answered. He had heard stories – stories about demons and ‘bad spirits’ but he never paid much attention. However, he sought the advice of a local priest who brought up his family in the town – a priest well known for his ability to exorcise the devil and his demons.

In fact, there are more priests in the region who practise exorcism and a few of my informants had a relationship with one or other of these priests. In some cases, this relationship involved confession and ‘spiritual’ guidance; in others, simply seeking *ad hoc* advice. Just like Christos, they were seeking guidance or advice because of unexpected events in their lives – ‘problems in the family’ were often mentioned. However, not everyone was in contact with one of them. Aris, for instance, spoke of ‘bad dreams’ that one of his neighbours had helped him understand. Eventually, though, most did seek the help of the Church – help that, in most cases, came from local priests. Village priests who were described as ‘traditional’ but, as far as I know, were not linked to any fundamentalist organizations. Still, however it happened, everyone emphasized how much their encounter with the devil had changed them.

Christos speaks of this change in terms of ‘repentance’ that gave him the opportunity to transform himself. Through prayer, fasting, communion and

guidance from ‘charismatic’ priests, he developed into what ‘[he] will have been today’. Perhaps, the one change that encapsulates his transformation is giving up the job he had at the time of the car crash in order to look for something that would allow him to share the burdens of others – he became a policeman.

…

Christo’s story reflects a number of themes well explored in the anthropological study of narrative. Ochs and Capps (1996) capture many of these themes in an especially suggestive way and can be used to highlight the challenge his ‘experience’ presents. Echoing the work of people like Ricoeur and Bruner, they emphasize the idea that personal narrative ‘is born out of experience and gives shape to experience’ (1996: 20). Hence, stories and lives cannot be separated. They also highlight the significance of ‘forging elements into a plot’ (ibid.: 25) – a narrative plot which imbues the past with significance in an attempt to construct present and future worlds. More than that, in terms of temporality, such a plot is told from the perspective of the present. A perspective within which, as they stress, ‘the most fundamental linguistic marking of the past’ is the past tense – a tense that ‘implies a time closer to the present’ (ibid.). In this way, stories do not simply represent or evoke the past; rather, they create an intricate link between the past and the present. Perhaps, as Ochs and Capps put it, it is important ‘to recognize that lives are the pasts we tell ourselves’ (ibid.: 21).

However, although he is forging a plot and creates a link between different points in time, I do not think what Christos tells himself is the past. Instead, I would like to suggest that what he tells himself is the future – a future conflated with the present and predating the past. To use his own words, his encounter with the devil was what helped him realize ‘what [he] will have been today’, ‘where [he] will have ended up today’.[4] Thus, to echo David Vilaseca, Christos’s past is ‘produced in that most paradoxical of tenses, the future perfect (*future antérieur*), a cluster of features that literally “are not” but always “will have been” (what came before “myself”, what preceded my own “renaissance”)’ (1999: 429).

In this sense, Christos’s narrative and the transformation it indexes can be seen as metaleptic, Moebius-strip like structures that confound the linear chronology of everyday existence and undermine the logic on which the distinction between cause and effect depends.

> What distinguishes the ‘Moebius strip’ is its subversion of the usual (Euclidean) way of representing space: the strip appears to have two sides when in fact it has only one: hence the impossibility of distinguishing its ‘back’ from its ‘front’. Likewise, what distinguishes a metalepsis (the rhetorical figure that takes a cause for its effect or vice versa) is its undermining of the temporal logic upon which the very distinction between cause and effect (what comes before and what comes after) is based. (ibid.: 427-8)

In other words, the Christos who tells the story precedes the Christos of

whom the story tells. The metaleptic nature of the narrative enables him to generate his own biography in the mode of 'what I will have been'. With the early Christos, the one before the crash, 'always already an effect and an offshoot of his namesake successor' (ibid: 429), it is present-day Christos who precedes him in a fashion that undermines the distinction between before and after turning himself into a cause and effect of his own history. Perhaps, echoing Benjamin's 'tiger's leap into the past' (1969: 255; cf. Vilaseca 1999), his narrative can be described as 'antinomic' – that is, to adopt Brian Richardson's definition, 'a doubly linear story that simultaneously moves backward and forward in time' (2002: 49).

Christos's narrative articulates the emergence of a rather distinctive understanding of the person he is – a person, that is, which produces its own biography in retrospect and in the future perfect of 'I will have been'. Conflating the hindsight of the storyteller with the foresight of the story's protagonist, it projects the future into the past and the past into the future. It allows him to look forward as though looking back. In terms of its narrative plot, the end pre-exists the beginning. Rather than anticipating a future, it turns the past into an effect of it. His story is not about what he was or what he is but about what always he will have been – to use his own words, 'a good Christian'.[5]

Through his encounter with the devil, he realized that 'the eyes of the soul' see much more than 'the eyes of the head'. Now, as he can 'see' the devil, he can help others 'see' him too. Help them separate 'the good' from 'the bad'. This is the quest that makes him a 'good Christian' and embeds the person '[he] will have been' in a local moral world. His story is not a simple recounting of his encounter with the devil, it is also a manifestation of who he is today – his existence, that is, within such a local moral world. This existence is articulated through a specific kind of personhood.

In the following section, I shall explore this personhood in order to show how it is intrinsically linked to a very particular understanding of morality. A morality which replicates the narrative logic of his story giving rise to an inherently relational person – a person that, just like its narration destabilizes the logic of cause and effect, destabilizes the distinction between self and other.

2. *Perichoresis*: Christos's 'heart'

The idea of 'local moral worlds' is mostly associated with the work of authors like Arthur Kleinman (2006) and Steven Parish (2008) – with work, that is, within which 'morality is a form of consciousness' (Csordas 2013: 524). However, to do justice to Christos and his story, we need to approach his moral world by going beyond morality as a form of consciousness. For Kleinman and Parish, consciousness is nothing more than a manifestation of a human self's realization. Such a realization does not capture the way Christos is a 'Good Christian' because of this emphasis on the self. As Parish has it,

> The self is not an essence, provided by nature or culture, but rather a process of living, existing, adapting, using capacities that human beings have – most centrally, in my estimation, their powers of memory, feeling, reflexivity. Using these capacities, the human self is capable of experiencing self, and reflecting on itself, not just consciously, but in struggles to be and to adapt. (2008: xi)

Thus, even though the self is not supposed to be an essence, it very much *is*. Caught in the 'struggles to be and to adapt', it is the originator of its own reflexive life and its travails. Just like memory and reflexivity, 'the struggles to be and to adapt' are predicates of being. Essentialized through these predicates, the self remains originary. In the encounters with the devil that lie at the center of my discussion, the self is not so much a cause but an effect or, rather, cause and effect intermingle substituting for each other. More than that, Christos does not simply struggle against the devil; he also struggles *for* those around him and, in this struggle, he replicates the way he is *with* God.

Echoing the significance of this *for* and *with*, what I would like to suggest is that the life his encounter with the devil revealed manifests a very particular ethics – an ethics he describes as 'touching' or 'embracing' others with his heart. It is this ethics that replicates the metaleptic logic of his story and gives rise to an inherently relational ethical self. With this ethics of the heart, as I will show, it is not simply a question of appreciating the way in which Christos's life is entangled with the lives of others but of coming to terms with the fashion in which this entanglement implies an absence of gaps between people, an embodied inter-penetration within which human beings are ex-centric.

Of course, in anthropology, the significance of ex-centricity is a truism – from sociality to intersubjectivity, it has been theorized in a number of different ways. However, as Hayder Al-Mohammad puts it (2010: 437),

> What is odd, […] is our ability to commit to a notion of human-being as *ec*centric (i.e. outside itself), or in the parlance of postmodernism, 'de-centred', spatially and temporally, inter-involved and intersubjective, yet our notion of ethics tends invariably towards and is centred on an ethics of the 'self'.

Thus, echoing the limitations of work like Parish's, this emphasis on an ethics of the self may be seen as another manifestation of our inability to think of morality and moral worlds beyond the self. Even the more reflexive 'ethical turn' of the last ten or fifteen years has not managed to avoid foregrounding an ethics of the self (e.g., Laidlaw 2002, Zigon 2007). In the work of Jaret Zigon, for instance, the 'ethical moment' is clearly differentiated from morality as 'a moment of conscious reflection and dialogue with one's own moral dispositions' (2009: 83). In this way, the self embarks on yet another quest giving anthropologists the opportunity to formulate 'an account of how the individual is able to consciously and intentionally remake her habitus' (ibid.). Zigon's emphasis on the individual self, just like Parish's or Kleinman's work, would misconstrue Christos's struggle and the ethics involved in it.

This is not to suggest that there has been no work that attempts to question

the predominance of the individual self and to frame ethical self-awareness in ways which transcend the model of self-consciousness. Al-Mohammad himself mentions the work of Saba Mahmood (2005) and Charles Hirschkind (2006). Nevertheless, the problem remains. For example, relying on Foucault's celebrated 'techniques of the self', Mahmood charts the way in which young Egyptian women who are members of an urban mosque movement come to constitute and understand themselves as ethical subjects. However, the ethical process she is describing is still a process of *self*-fashioning. Whether it succeeds or not, it is still articulated as a technique *of* and *for* the self which 'leaves as unproblematic relations with others *as subjects*, bypassing the inter-subjectivity of relationships' (Retsikas 2013: 120).

In this way, whatever else it might be, the ethical encounter remains a self-quest – a quest which would fail to address the fashion in which Christos's ethics of the heart is constituted *with* and *for* others.[6] So, to return to the ethnography, what is the ethics of the heart and how is it formulated?

…

'This is what it's like', Christos says, pointing at the church. 'The Church is God's embrace, it's his heart'. He understands his own quest for 'what [he] will have been today' along similar lines. He too has managed to learn how to embrace the people around him with his heart. His encounter with the devil has enabled him 'to walk with his heart in front [of him]'.

The church he is pointing at is not in the town in which he lives. This is June 2014 and we have travelled to a village, three hours away, in order to meet a priest Christos admires and describes as 'charismatic'. Father Anastasis is in his late sixties. He is tall and full of rigour. Unfortunately, there is not much time for discussion. With the ordinary service over, Father Anastasis is preparing to share his 'charisma' with those that need his help. As soon as some of the ordinary church goers have left, he asks those of us standing near the door and windows to close them.

It is at this point I notice that another group of people have entered the church. 'The ones taken by demons' (o*i demonismenoi*), Christos whispers in my ear. With the doors and windows closed, we spent the next hour in sweltering heat watching Father Anastasis fight the devil and his demons. There is a middle-aged woman who keeps cursing God. There is a young man who keeps spitting and shouting. There is a young girl who keeps laughing and provoking the priest. 'Look, look', Christos whispers every time the priest touches one of them with his hand. His touch 'burns', 'hurts', 'scorches'. It is his scorching touch that 'sets them alight' and forces the demons out. The crucial thing, as Christos has it, is that the priest does not touch them with his hand – 'he touches them with his heart' (*tous akoumbai me tin kardia tou*).[7] In other words, the efficacy of the exorcism depends on a very particular understanding of the relation between the exorcist and the afflicted which is articulated in and through the heart. Touching those who are

possessed by demons with his heart, Father Anastasis shares their pain and 'his love for God with them'. He 'embraces them'.

Christos is not equating the strength of his heart with that of the priest. He is only trying to show me the significance of the heart in the life of a 'good Christian' – a Christian who is prepared to embrace those in need with his heart. What makes this embrace especially difficult to understand is the way it intermingles the one and the many. While he is performing the exorcism, Father Anastasis remains himself but he also becomes a part of those he touches and they a part of him. As Christos put is, 'he is inside them' (*einai mesa tous*), 'his heart is beating with their hearts' (*I kardia tou htipaei me tin kardia tous*) but it is the efficacy of his 'innocent' self that enables him to do what he is doing. In a wonderful expression, which I heard from another priest, the ones he is helping 'are on his bill' (*einai ston logariasmo tou*), 'they are charged [by God] to his account' (*tous hreonetai ston logariasmo tou*). This is the account God will check when Father Anastasis dies in order to decide the fate of his soul.

In the next few weeks, I had the opportunity to discuss the significance of the heart with a number of my informants. In her early fifties, Maria is looking after her elderly parents. She has also devoted herself to taking care of a young boy that needed her help. Like Christos, she had an encounter with the devil which helped her understand how important it is to engage with God though one's heart. As she put it, you see God through the 'eyes of your soul' but your soul is 'in your heart'. Using the 'eyes of your head' is not enough because God is something you 'feel' rather than understand with your 'brain'. She perceives her relationship with her parents and the boy in terms of her heart – she 'shares' (*mirazei*) her heart with them. They become a part of her just like she becomes a part of them. Their hearts are 'beating together'. However, like with Father Anastasis, it is still Maria's 'account'. Her quest to become and remain a good Christian.

More evocatively, Giorgos places his right hand on his heart and starts counting its beats – 'one, two, three …'. 'You hear God', he says; 'you don't see him, you hear him as you hear your heart'. Giorgos is in his early fifties and owns a small shop in the centre of town. His quest for the 'true faith' started with an encounter with the devil too – with Christ's help, he had to fight him for a whole night. This encounter led him to the true Christian life – a life which 'is lived with the heart'. As Christ 'touched him' with his heart, the night he fought with the devil, he wants to 'touch' the people around him. As he became a part of God, he wants them to become a part of him. For Giorgos, just like Maria and Christos, to touch people with your heart is to share their problems and their pain, 'to become one' (*na gineis ena*) with them and allow them to become 'a part of yourself' (*ena kommati to eaftou sou*). 'The heart is embrace' (*i kardia einai agkalia*), he says with a smile.

There are similarities between the way in which my informants foregrounded the heart and its significance within the Greek Orthodox monastic tradition. Hagiorite monks believe that 'the soul (*psichi*) of a man consists of three different qualities: *Logiki, Noera* and *Zotiki*. […] *Logiki* is for thinking, *Noera* is

for feeling and *Zotiki* is for moving' (Coubarelis 1995: 67). Each one is associated with a different part of the human body - *logiki* is lodged in the brain, *noera* in the heart and *zotiki* in the genital organs (ibid.). However, although they are all important, it is with *noera* we perceive God – indeed, *noera* is described as 'the eye of the soul' (ibid.: 164). My informants never spoke of *noera* but they did speak of the 'eyes of the soul' and the heart. In fact, in terms of the actual senses, the vision that emerges from one's heart is associated more with ears than eyes. To echo Maria, you 'hear God inside you, you listen to Him with your heart'.

Beyond the monastic tradition and religion, the emphasis on sharing one's heart as a form of relationship brings to mind an idiom often utilized to describe intimate male friends in Greece. They are 'friends of the heart'. As Papataxiarchis puts it, they 'share what lies in the heart' (1991: 170). 'Heart-friendship' is about sharing and sameness. It is a relationship which, just like the ones Maria or Giorgos spoke about, allows people to 'express their feelings, not to one another, but *with* another' (ibid.: 178).

Thus, the stories my friends tell of their encounter with the devil are intrinsically associated with the emergence of a distinct kind of personhood – a personhood premised on the efficacy of the heart. It is through their heart they come to know God and relate to those around them. They walk with their heart 'in front' of them. They embrace those who need them with their heart – just like God does. In this way, their relationship with God is replicated in relation to those around them giving rise to an inherently relational ethics; an ethics which subverts any clear distinction between inside and outside or self and other. More than that, this subversion is premised on their quest to intermingle with those they embrace while they remain committed to their own selves, their own 'account' – to be, that is, both *one* and *many*.

Perhaps the best way to describe this subversion is as extimacy. Meant to question the separation of inside and outside, the term was introduced by Jacques Lacan. By asserting that the interior is present in the exterior and vice versa, extimacy was meant to problematize binary oppositions like subject/object, past/future and, above all, self/other. In Lacan's understanding of subjectivity, as the unconscious is outside us, the human subject is not simply de-centred but 'ex-centric' (1991: 9). Along these lines, the way my informants' ethics is formulated places their heart both inside and outside them reflecting an 'intimate exteriority' (Lacan 1992: 139) within which they intermingle with others.

However, rather than Lacan's psychoanalytic elaboration, what makes extimacy especially relevant to my discussion is the way it echoes a number of much older Christian conceptualizations of the relationship between humans and God. Conceptualizations like Saint Augustine's conception of God as 'more interior than my most interior being' (*Confessions*, III, VI) or, much more significantly for my purposes, the patristic notion of *perichoresis* and the way it was developed over the years in the context of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The doctrine of *perichoresis* has been extremely important in Christian theology. Although the verb *perichoreo* (from which the noun is derived) appears for the first time in the work of Gregory Nazianzus and his *Epistle 101*, it can be traced back to the Stoic concept of mixture (*krasis*) which 'means a complete mutual interpenetration of two substances that preserves the identity and properties of each intact' (Harrison 1991: 54). Developed further by theologians like Maximus the Confessor and Pseudo-Cyril, it came to occupy an extremely important position in theology where, 'it conveys the simultaneity of rest and movement, of coinherence and interpenetration, among the persons of the Trinity, between the two natures in Christ, and among God and deified human persons in the transfigured creation' (ibid.: 55). This interpenetration is also reflected in the belief that all the persons of the Trinity are consubstantial with each other – they are of 'one essence' (*homoousios*).

Hence, invoking a distinctive kind of mixture, *perichoresis* involves unity in separation and vice versa. The persons of the Trinity interpenetrate each other; they are in one another but remain distinct. As Jurgen Moltman puts it, 'The doctrine of the perichoresis links together in a brilliant way the threeness and the unity, without reducing the threeness to the unity, or dissolving the unity in the threeness' (1981: 175). In the kind of theology Moltman's work represents, the significance of this threeness has been used to distinguish between the way the conceptualization of the Trinity was developed in the East and in the West. More specifically,

> it is often claimed that the Cappadocians in the East took as their starting point the three persons of the Trinity and *then* asked about unity whereas Augustine in the West began with the oneness of God, with an abstract notion of the divine substance, and then puzzled over how to give an account of the threeness of the persons. (Kilby 2000: 434)

Whether such sharp differentiation between East and West is justified or not, there is something of *perichoresis* in the life of my informants and the way they are separate and united both with the people around them and with God. 'To embrace with your heart' those who need you is to become a part of them and they a part of you. However, despite this intermingling, you remain yourself. More than that, this embrace replicates the way you were embraced by God when you encountered the devil.

Thus, *perichoresis* invites us to shift our thinking away from the dualism implicit in the contrast between self and other, individuality and collectivity, the one and the many. It gives us the opportunity to appreciate the proximity and openness of the ethics of the heart without having to think in terms of a self and an other. Plurality never becomes sameness but, at the same time, it does not turn into absolute difference. As *perichoretic* selves, my informants can be a part of others and others can be a part of them without risking their individuality – an individuality which echoes the way the persons of the Trinity interpenetrate each other instantiating unity in separation and vice versa.

Of course, I cannot pretend that any of my informants were theologians. In fact, aside from a discussion or two with a couple of priests, *perichoresis* never came up. Even when I asked people like Maria and Giorgos what they thought of it, there was very little they could say. Interestingly, however, they explained it in terms of *perichora* – that is, 'surrounding' or 'neighbouring' which captures the sense of connection and proximity without definite breaks or distance (as in 'town surroundings').

Nevertheless, to return to Christos, he is with God in the same way he tries to be with others. His story and his self are parts of each other. The logic of his narrative is replicated in the logic of his ethical quest and his body. Just like metalepsis undermines the temporal logic of cause and effect in his story, *perichoresis* subverts the distinction between the inside and the outside in his body. His heart, the locus of his faith and his most treasured feelings, is externalized in an 'intimate exteriority' giving rise to a *perichoretic* self.

Intriguingly, both as metalepsis and *perichoresis,* his encounter with the devil extends beyond the particularities of his own life. It gives rise to an exegesis of 'historical' events which allows Christos to locate himself in the wider context of Greece and, more specifically, 'The Crisis' – a crisis which, as I shall show, is grasped as another manifestation of the devil.

3. *I Krisis* ('The Crisis'): The Future of Christos's Past

July 2017. Sitting in a cafes in the town square, we are discussing the way 'The Crisis' started. 'It was Andreas Papandreou', Christos says.

Papandreou's Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) brought to an end 50 years of political domination by conservative forces and became synonymous with the political slogan 'change'. This was 1981. 'Change!', Christos laughs. 'Nothing changed; just like everyone else, he just wanted to eat, he was greedy – greedy like the devil'. To 'eat' (*phaei*), in this context, is to plunder the wealth of the country. However, there is nothing surprising about Papandreou's greediness – after all, as Christos put it, 'he was not even Greek; American he was'. And the Americans, 'as we all know', have been behind most of the upheavals that befell Greece in recent years. In this way, Christos brought together the military Junta of the late 60s and early 70s, the partition of Cyprus, the economic downturn of 2008 and, of course, the crisis and austerity of the last eight years.

Many of those to whom I spoke expressed similar sentiments. However, rather than 'the Americans', it was 'the Europeans', 'the foreigners' or 'the West' who were responsible for Greece's woes. Just like Christos's 'Americans', 'the Europeans', 'the foreigners' and 'the West' allowed people to make connections between disparate events in Greek history bringing them together.

The manner in which my informants used the devil's greediness to connect historical events echoes a number of recent ethnographic analyses of Greece

and the economic crisis which illustrate different ways in which the past resurfaces in the present (see Knight & Stewart 2016). Daniel Knight, for instance, has tried to 'follow [his] informants as they "bounce around" the past, sewing together moments that help them make sense of their current situation' (2017: 28). He shows how their narratives jump from describing the oppression in the Ottoman era to War World II occupation and the recent stock market crash. These narratives bring together the past and the present in an attempt to explain the current crisis and imagine the future. In the process, different moments of the past 'are relived' in the present creating a (poly)temporal experience of time and history.

Nevertheless, there is an important difference between my ethnography and work like Knight's. Despite a shared emphasis on the paradoxical temporality of the narratives, my informants do not try to recover meaning from the past in an attempt to make sense of the present and imagine the future. It is not the past that speaks to the future but the future that speaks to the past. Replicating their encounter with the devil and the way it is narrated, the present precedes the past turning the current crisis into a cause and effect of its own history. The economic crisis is nothing more than another manifestation of the way in which the devil's greediness is present in people's lives. Like Christos's story, the history of the crisis is read backwards foregrounding the devil. This emphasis on the devil problematizes the idea that there is anything new to the current crisis – an idea which dominates most of the ethnographic literature that explores its significance (for examples, see Kalantzis 2016: 7).

However, to return to the ethnographic literature, there are similarities between my argument and work that 'describes "the new" as building on pre-existing attitudes' (ibid.). In an intriguing argument that moves beyond the assumed objectivity of historical events and the way they may be remembered, Charles Stewart explores dreams of religious icons in Island Greece as elaborations of previously unknown episodes from the past, as 'novel histories' rather than 'memories' (2012: 215). If we were to conflate 'novel histories' and 'memories' in order to think about 'novel memories', we would have a good approximation of the way my informants foreground the devil and interpret the signs of his presence. They remember the future but the future they remember is yet to happen – it will happen when these signs are recognized for what they are. In order to explicate these signs and the presence of the devil in the current crisis, let me return to my informants' views of 'the Europeans' or 'the Americans' and the way they 'sold' or plundered Greece.

It would be easy to dismiss such views as examples of obsessive suspicion and paranoia. However, as Brown and Theodossopoulos argue in their analysis of similar narratives that emerged as explanations of the 1999 NATO intervention in Yugoslavia, '(r)ather than dismissing their tellers and listeners as paranoid, schizophrenic or simply "other", we should perhaps seek to appreciate the bases of their appeal and coherence' (2000: 8). In their work, they link such narratives to anxiety which arises when 'a culturally constructed universe' cannot explain the logic of political events. From a different point of

view, Greek discontent against foreigners may reflect what Herzfeld has construed as 'cryptocolonialism' – 'the paradoxical condition', as he puts it, 'of a national independence that was contingent on the approval and support of colonial powers' (2011: 25). Cryptocolonialist or not, the current crisis may be seen as opposed to Greek understandings of themselves and their world. For instance, the idea of a national debt that has to be repaid once and for all is opposed to the traditional view of obligation 'in which creditor and debtor are roles taken in endless alternation' (ibid.: 24).

My informants' views on 'Americans' or 'Europeans' were anything but exercises in paranoia. Still, in most cases, they did not reflect discontent against foreigners or a culturally constructed universe pushed to the limits of its explanatory power. Instead, linking 'the Americans' and 'the Europeans' with the devil, they were attempts to criticize the Greeks themselves. As Maria had it, 'the West sold Greece off but it was us who allowed them to do it' – it was our insatiable desire for 'wealth', the constant quest for 'material things'. Once again, it was Christos who captured this sense of disillusionment best: 'it is the Americans' fault', he said; 'but what can you do?', he continued; 'we are all Americans now, we see only the flesh'. Similarly, for Maria, 'we are governed by Pharisees and most of us are the same, […] this is a rotting society'.

However, what needs to be stressed is that it does not have to be like this. God gave us the opportunity to realize what is happening and change it. The 'signs' (*simadia*), to echo Giorgos, 'are here'. In one way or another, most of my informants spoke about signs – signs which show the presence of the devil and the way he tempts us through material things. What is remarkable is the way a particular set of prophecies[8] was used by many of them to illustrate these signs (Brown and Theodossopoulos 2000: 8). These prophecies are mostly associated with Kosmas the Aitolian or *Patrokosmas* ('Father Kosmas'), a Greek Orthodox monk who was born in 1714 and put to death by the Ottomans in 1779. Eventually, he was glorified by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1961. Father Kosmas is famous throughout Greece for his prophecies – it is said that anything from the destructiveness of aerial bombardment to the development of the telephone or the internet can be found in his prophecies (see Vlahos 2017).

It was through Father Kosmas God gave us the opportunity to realize what was happening and change it. However, we did not because we failed to 'see' the meaning of the signs. For instance, when television aerials started appearing on the roofs of our houses, we did not realize they were 'the horns of the devil' as he had prophesized. Along these lines, televisions, mobile phones, climate change, 'stress', they were all described as signs of the devil – signs we failed to recognize for what they were. The crisis itself is explicated along these lines. Reflecting on the way debt has forced people to share their meagre resources, Maria referred to Father Kosmas's prophecy of 'three families [living] in a single house'. Discussing the irrationality of the innumerable pension cuts, Christos described Syriza and the Greek prime minister as '*alala kai balala*'. Almost everyone spoke about Father Kosmas's prophecy according to which 'they will put a tax on hens and windows' –

something that happened with the ENFIA tax imposed on 2014 as an attempt to secure Greece's debt re-payments. The signs are here, 'in front of our eyes', but we do not recognize them for what they are.

It is this lack of recognition that links my informants' stories with 'The Crisis'. Their exegesis, just like the story of Christos's encounter with the devil, is based on the idea that the present would have been configured by the right future if it had been properly understood in the past. In other words, the origin of the crisis is constructed from their interpretation of signs which are themselves effects of the interpretation. The signs of the devil both precede the crisis and are a product of it – that is, the crisis functions as both an effect and a cause of its own history undermining the temporal logic upon which the distinction between cause and effect depends.

More than that, the devil himself can be seen as a sign. A sign of what needs to be conquered within each one of us and, in this sense, a sign from God. To echo one of my friends, who was a priest, '[the devil] laughs when we laugh and cries when we cry'; he is 'our twin, our mirror'. However, the 'greediness' associated with the devil is not something that characterizes only Greeks, politicians, 'the Americans' or 'the West'. It is something that characterizes all 'humans' (*anthropous*). The devil is within each one of us. He is in our thoughts and actions when our 'soul is not turned towards God'. After all, as Christos had it, 'we are all Americans now' – that is, we need to change ourselves in order to change the Americans. Here, the metaleptic nature of the devil's signs is reintroduced in a form that undermines any clear distinction between self and other. It is by changing ourselves that we will change others. To affect this change, we need to 'turn our soul towards God'. This is the only way to defeat the temptation that is always there.

The devil is not simply there, he is also necessary. As Giorgos declared a number of times, 'God takes aim at us with the devil, […] it is the devil that makes us good'. As I was told again and again, 'God is judging us (*krinei*) with the doings of the devil'. *Krino* ('to judge'), of course, is the verb from which the noun *krisis* ('crisis') comes. From this point of view, the lives of all Christians are thought to be in constant crisis. The economic crisis itself is nothing more than an example of this crisis. Thus, to contextualize 'The Crisis' in the particulars of one's life or Greek history would be a mistake – for my informants, God's *krisis* is the context; it is their life.

This life did not translate into a unified stance. There was very little that brought people like Maria, Giorgos and Christos together in terms of politics or resistance. Their appreciation of the devil's presence was not a call to arms in the name of 'the Greek Nation' – a nation that has to re-discover itself. Although there were one or two exceptions, the emphasis was not on the Greeks but on 'humans'. As Maria put it, 'we owe money neither to the Americans nor the Germans; money we owe to God; we all do, we are all humans'. More poignantly, two years after my fieldwork, looking at a photograph of the three-year-old Syrian boy who drowned in the Mediterranean sea, Maria's friend Julia said: 'the devil, just like God, is the same for all of us; we are all humans'.

Conclusion

In his *Meaning in History* (1949), Karl Lowith introduces the idea of a prophecy in reverse in order to distinguish between two rather different understandings of history,

> In the Greek and Roman mythologies and genealogies the past is represented as an everlasting foundation. In the Hebrew and Christian view of history the past is a promise to the future; consequently, the interpretation of the past becomes a prophecy in reverse, demonstrating the past as a meaningful 'preparation' for the future. (ibid.: 6)

In this sense, my informants' narratives can be described as prophecies in reverse. Reconfiguring the order between the past, the present and the future, they are used to indicate the past as a moment of truth – a moment of truth which allowed them to prepare for the future; a future, however, predating the past. This reconfiguration allows them to narrate their encounters with the devil in a way that undermines the temporal logic of before and after generating their biography retrospectively. In this sense, they establish themselves both as effect and cause of their own history. More than that, the metaleptic characteristics of their stories are replicated in the 'intimate exteriority' of their hearts and the *perichoretic* nature of their ethics – an ethics which subverts the distinction between self and other just like their narratives subvert the distinction between before and after.

Thus, to echo the way I introduced this paper, the stories we tell and the lives we live are not necessarily 'marked by anticipation of some end, one which […] does not exist at the beginning'. In the stories my informants tell, the end pre-exists the beginning. Transformed into an everyday ethics of the heart, their stories obviate the experiential difference between the past, the present and the future substituting cause for effect. Their narratives do not represent history nor do they belong to it – instead, they are history. Indeed, they are reminiscent of the 'images' which Melanesians are said to construct for themselves. According to Marilyn Strathern, these 'images' are unlike historical events because they 'contain within them both past and future time […], they embody history themselves' (1990: 25).

As I tried to show, this embodiment manifests a very particular world. A world within which, as Stewart puts it, the 'devil occupies the lowest rung in in a hierarchy of which God commands the pinnacle, with humanity vacillating in between' (1991: 153). In this sense, the devil is always there. In the way he constantly seeks to tempt people to sin, he constitutes a perpetual present. Indeed, 'The Crisis' itself is nothing more than another example of the devil's constant presence.

It is in relation to this perpetual present that the future perfect of my informants' narratives is mobilized in order to mark out their past as a moment of truth. However, their encounters with the devil and the way they are narrated do not simply reflect the constant battle between good and evil. They

also convey the way their recognition of the devil's constant presence and their appreciation of the 'invisible war' allow them to look forward as though looking back. Here metalepsis is much more than a narrative trope or a metaphor. It is, first and foremost, a way of life which takes an eschatological stance towards the future by turning the past into a meaningful preparation for it – a future which, albeit prefigured in the past, needs to be recognized and developed through 'turning one's soul towards God' by resisting the devil and 'uncovering his customs'. Through this turning, people like Giorgos and Christos live and tell their stories hoping to present the right 'accounts' to God when the time comes – a time which, rather than anticipated, *always will have been*.

NOTES

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[1] All names are pseudonyms. In one or two cases, I have also changed a few biographical details (e.g., occupation).

[2] Most of the ethnographic information was collected in Spring/Summer 2014. However, I have visited a number of times since then.

[3] David Carr's (1986) argument that human experience itself has a beginning, a middle and an end is the clearest expression of this idea. Of course, from David Carr to Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) and Paul Ricoeur (1984), it has been framed in a number of ways – ways Mattingly echoes and develops in her work.

[4] Sentences like 'what I will have been today' (*afto pou tha eho ginei simera*) or 'where I will have ended up today' (*pou tha eho katalixei simera*) are slightly awkward – *tha* ('will') and *simera* ('today') are not usually used together. For instance, in terms of Greek grammar, 'where I will have ended up' would have been more appropriate. However, the imperfect grammar further emphasizes the way the past and the future are brought together.

[5] There is something reminiscent of what has been called 'figural' interpretation of history in Christos's narrative. 'Figural' interpretation has been beautifully explored by Erich Auerbach in his essay 'Figura' (1984). He shows how history was figural in the Biblical exegesis provided by Church Fathers like Tertullian – a history, that is, wherein events in the past are thought to pre-figure events in the future. For example, Joshua is a *figura* of Christ – Joshua is the 'type' which finds its fulfillment in Christ. However, this idea of fulfillment does not quite capture the stories my informants tell. In their stories, their past is an effect and an offshoot of their future.

[6] For a sophisticated and truly perceptive exploration of an 'other-oriented' ethics see Diego Malara's discussion of Orthodox Christians in Addis Ababa (2017).

[7] A priest's stole is very important in this context but this is a story that will have to be told elsewhere.

[8] Prophecy has gained quite some prominence in the context of the current crisis. For an imaginative articulation of its significance see Eleana Yalouri (2016).

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